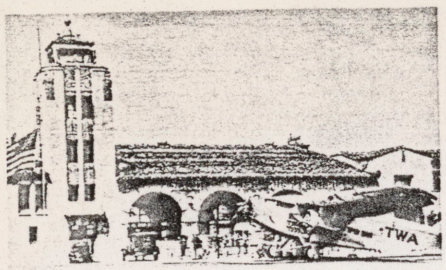
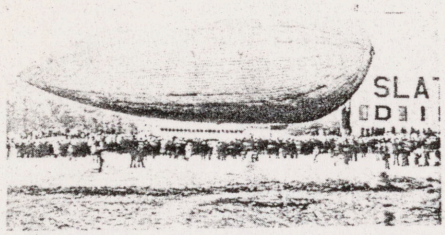
Grand Central Air Terminal–GLENDALE'S PIONEER



A TWA Ford Tri-motor in front of the Terminal, October, 1930.



The Slate Dirigible takes to the air!



Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin were among passengers on first American Airlines flight from Grand Central.

How many Lens-land vacationers have found themselves — while fighting the traffic on the freeway or the perpetual jam at LAX — wishing that Southern California's largest airport was as conveniently located as, say, Glendale? Well, they are only 50 years too late!

L.A.'s PREMIER AIRPORT—1929

For several years, from 1929 through the mid-thirties, Glendale's Grand Central Air Terminal was SoCal's premier airport. However, the story of Glendale's pioneer airport and of the city's contribution to the development of aviation starts long before 1929 and includes many of the famous names of that era.

L. C. BRAND—AIR PIONEER

Many residents of Glendale first became aware of air travel when Leslie C. Brand — pioneer land developer — began assembling his personal collection of "aeroplanes" in 1912. He had a private field and one of the first private hangars in Southern California on the southwest corner of Mountain and Grandview, just south of his "El Miradero" home.

Shortly after World War I, numbers of returning pilots — many of whom were "barnstorming" with their own "Jennies" — settled in the area and began dreaming of creating a mammoth aviation industry in the Southland and, incidentally, of gaining city support for a public airport in Glendale.

Their spokesman, Thornton E. Hamlin, made an appeal to the Chamber of Commerce for help in securing a landing field where hangars could be built, service facilities established, manufacture of aircraft undertaken and scheduled airmail flights to San Francisco started. The Chamber's interest soon centered on a 33-acre ranch south of the Southern Pacific right-of-way and adjacent to the southern end of Grandview Ave.

CITY SPONSORS PROJECT

With Mayor Spencer Robinson presiding, the City Council gave approval on December 9, 1922 for purchase of the property from owner John D. Radcliffe for $66,000.

After the transaction, the City began clearing the land and constructing a paved runway. The City's purchase was soon threatened, however, by legal action. The suit never reached trial because the sponsors, including Dr. T. C. Young, formed a syndicate, paid the City for funds expended and took control of the project.

No longer encumbered by legal entanglements, the area started to develop. A number of hangars were constructed and the Kinner Motor Co. began production of its highly regarded aircraft engine.

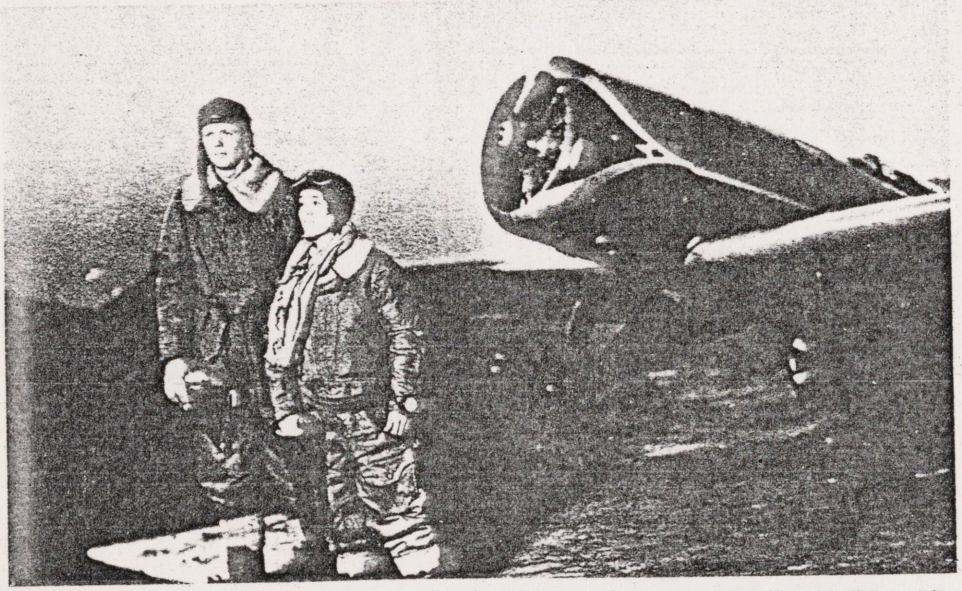
"AIR RODEO" LAUNCHES FACILITY

Originally christened Glendale Airport, the facility was dedicated on March 17, 1923 with a big air-show which included Amelia Earhart flying her Kinner "Airster."

THE SLATE DIRIGIBLE

During the airport's life as "Glendale Airport," one of the more colorful chapters in the history of Southland aviation took place here. From 1925 to 1929 the field housed Slate Aircraft Corp., founded by inventor Capt. Thomas B. Slate to construct an all-metal dirigible of novel design. After his first two attempts failed because high winds blew down the big hull, Slate built a large hangar at the east end of the field and, with a work force of 10 men, began construction anew. This third try resulted in a completed craft 212 feet long and 58 feet in diameter. The airship's capacity was 337,000 cubic feet of gas and the cabin accommodated 35 passengers with a crew of five. Called "The City of Glendale," the craft finally became airborne. However, expanding hydrogen, backed up by a frozen relief valve, burst some of the seams and the ship was hauled back into its hangar, never to be rebuilt. This fiasco had cost Slate his own personal fortune along with many thousands of dollars subscribed by others.

(As a footnote to the dirigible story — the Los Angeles Times carried an "obit" on Capt. Slate on December 8 — just as we were going to press. Datelined Portland, this was a belated announcement



Charles Lindbergh and wife/navigator Anne are seen wearing first electrically-heated flying suits, ready to climb into the open cockpits of their Lockheed "Sirius" at Grand Central. The time was April, 1930, and they were to soar to 14,000 feet and streak for Wichita and New York in the record time of 14 hours and 46 minutes—a long cold flight.

AIRPORT

By Walter Preston

of his death at age 99 in a Corvallis, Oregon, nursing home on November 26.)

"GRAND CENTRAL" OPENS

While the Slate saga was running its course, an expansion of the airport by C. C. and C. A. Spicer resulted in the birth of the Grand Central Air Terminal. Construction of the control tower and terminal building was started in October, 1928, and the new facility was officially opened on February 22, 1929.

Under the management of Maj. C. C. Moseley, a wartime fighter pilot and one of the founders of Western Air Express (now Western Airlines), Grand Central inaugurated scheduled air service by Maddux Airlines and Transcontinental Air Transport. On July 8, 1929, the first coast-to-coast airline flight left for New York from Grand Central, with the immortal Charles Lindbergh at the controls and Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., among the party on board.

FAMED PILOTS' BASE

That same year, the Spicer interests sold the airport to Curtiss-Wright for c. $2 milion. Utilized by a number of major airlines, Grand Central was the favored departure point for such stars as Fairbanks, Pickford and Charlie Chaplin. Such famed pilots as "Lucky Lindy," Amelia Earhart and "Wrong Way" Corrigan regularly used the field. Wiley Post and Will Rogers departed on their ill-fated, final, 'round-the-world flight from Grand Central.

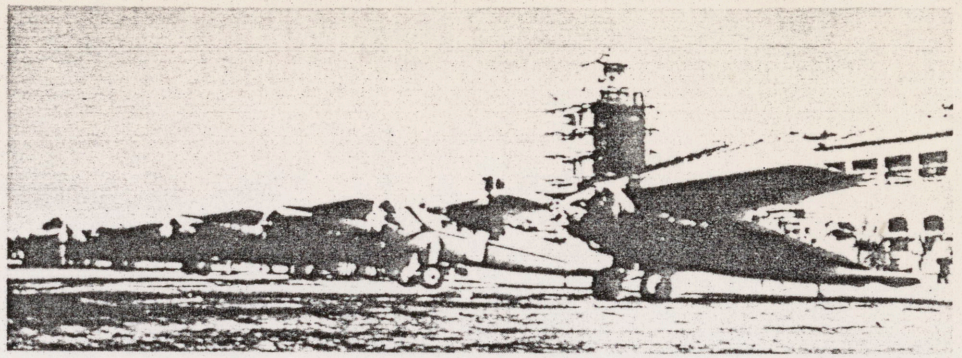
The company operating the airport did business under the name of Curtiss Flying Service and was engaged in airplane and engine overhaul and repair, airplane sales and service and charter service in addition to regular airport operation.

MAJOR MOSELEY TAKES OVER

In 1934, Major Moseley leased the facility from the corporate owners and began operations as Aircraft Industries Company. Later he obtained clear title to the property, assumed distributorship and service of Wright aero engines and changed the name of the technical school being operated at Grand Central to Cal-Aero Technical Institute.

WARTIME TRAINING CENTER

In 1939, as many of the airlines transferred service to the somewhat larger Lockheed Air Terminal (now Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport) the technical school began a pilot training program with civilian instructors for the Army Air Corps. Cal-Aero's three flight academies — at Oxnard, Ontario and in the Antelope Valley — trained some 26,000 combat pilots during the World War II years, including several groups for Britain's RAF.



Wiley Post's original "Winnie Mae"—Lockheed "Vega" NC 7954—is seen at far right of this late 1928 photo of new Lockheed craft on the apron at Grand Central. Terminal building under construction in background.

During this same period, the technical school produced 7,500 master mechanics for the Army Air Corps and the Navy. In addition to providing these training centers and constructing mobile units for the Western Technical Training Command, Grand Central acted as a prime contractor in extensive aircraft maintenance and overhaul programs for the armed services.

OVERHAUL AND REPAIR "CAPITAL"

The rapid growth of Grand Central soon made Glendale the location of the nation's largest center engaged in the repair, overhaul and modification of planes and engines.

After the war, Grand Central continued to hold pre-eminence in this field, doing work for air forces, airlines and large corporations from around the world.

Still under the aegis of Major Moseley — who meanwhile had been awarded the Order of the British Empire for his work with the RAF — Grand Central also pioneered in solid-fuel rocket propulsion systems.

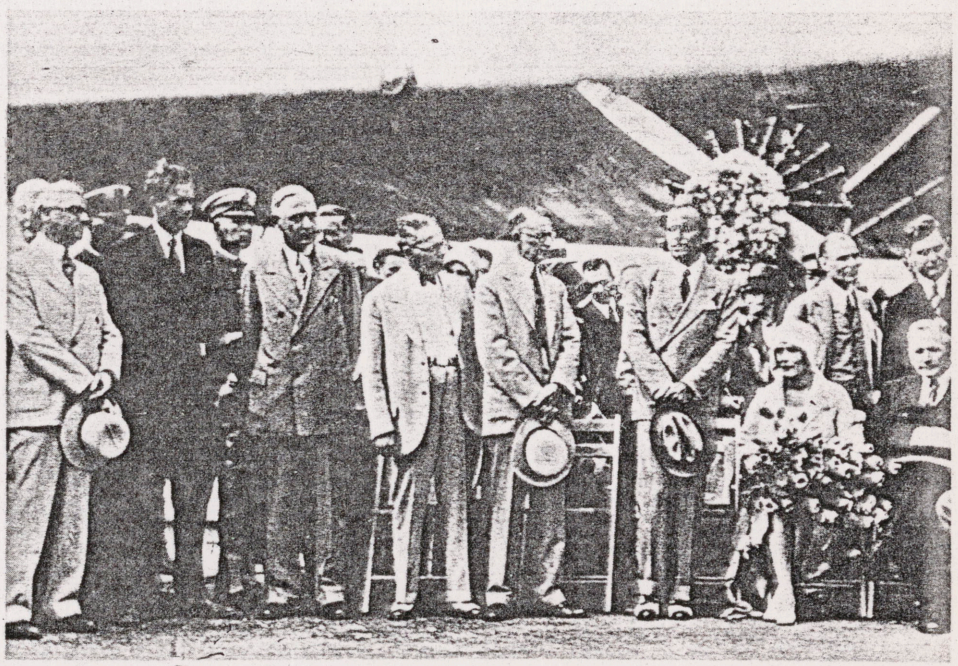
AIRPORT CLOSES

In 1955, Grand Central, with its short 3,400-foot runway unable to handle the new jets, was closed to air traffic. In 1970, long after the beginning of development of the Grand Central Industrial Center, the aircraft company was closed down after thirty-six years of successful operation.

Major Moseley—surfeited with honors from governments, professional societies and corporations world-wide — died in June 1974, and today little remains of his famous Grand Central.

THE LAST REMINDER

The old control tower — designed by architect H. L. Greggerty to incorporate both elements of Spanish Colonial Revival and "Zig-zag" Moderne—still stands as part of the headquarters building of the current industrial park. Stripped of most of its decoration, it still thrusts skyward the lone reminder of Glendale's "Golden Age of Aviation."



Launching a new era in aerial transportation, July 8, 1929. At ceremonies before departure of first coast-to-coast passenger flight, grouped before starboard engine of "giant" Ford Tri-motor are (from left): Capt. C. C. Spicer, president and general manager of Grand Central; Col. Lindbergh; Mayor John C. Porter of Los Angeles; Glendale Mayor C. E. Kimlin; Congressman W. E. Evans; Douglas Fairbanks; Mary Pickford and California Governor C. C. Young.